

London Evening Standard



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LIB-DEM SUSPENDED AFTER CLAIMING 'EXCESSIVE' RENT

LAWS 'SORRY' FOR CHEATING ON RENT

Nicholas Cecil, Joe Murphy
and Craig Woodhouse

FALLEN Liberal Democrat star David Laws issued an unprecedented public apology today after being found guilty of a string of serious breaches of expenses rules.

The former Cabinet minister misled Commons authorities over his housing arrangements with his secret gay lover, an inquiry found.

His partner "benefited" from excessive rent claims by the MP running into thousands of pounds, it suggested. A property expert concluded Mr Laws paid up to £300 more than the market rate in some months.

But Parliament's anti-sleaze watchdog found no evidence he or his lover had intended to fleece the taxpayer.

Mr Laws, 45, now faces a seven-day suspension from the Commons. He insists he concealed that he was renting accommodation from his partner because he did not want his sexuality to be revealed – not to make personal gain.

He stressed that Parliamentary Standards Commissioner Sir John Lyon, who carried out the inquiry, had accepted he could have claimed more. He has already repaid £56,000.

But the powerful Commons Standards and Privileges Committee delivered a scathing verdict on his conduct, which took place over a "considerable time".

Mr Laws rocked the Government last May when he resigned as Chief Secretary to the Treasury after just 17 days in office, after it was reported that he had been renting from his partner James Lundie. In a statement today, the MP, who has now come out to family and friends, said: "I take full responsibility for the mistakes which I have made. I apologise to my constituents and to Parliament.

"Each of us should be our own sternest critic, and I recognise that my attempts to keep my personal life private were in conflict with my duty as an MP to ensure that my claims



Making eyes: Angelina Jolie with Jack Black in Cannes, promoting Kung Fu Panda II. The star reveals that her new tattoo shows the latitude and longitude of Brad Pitt's birthplace in Oklahoma



when he was eight, finding his father's on top of a cupboard. "I wanted to be a rock star and have lots of girlfriends," he says, but when his dad dug out an old Segovia LP, Milos was instantly hooked on classical guitar instead. "I loved it. It felt like something I could grab onto, as

natural raw talent was refined through sheer hard work and inspirational teachers at school. Barely into his teens, he travelled to Paris to play a concert, the first time he'd been outside Montenegro, and there bought his first proper guitar using his parents' savings. Nothing

her to attend Saturday school at the Royal Academy of Music. She agrees with Milos that the guitar has the power to transport the player to beautiful imaginary places and that it's "like being Aladdin on a magic carpet". She wants to study music at Oxford, and she probably will.

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CHI-CHI NWANOKU AND TAHMIDUR RAHMAN, 13, DOUBLE BASSISTS

CHI-CHI Nwanoku used to play with her next-door neighbour in Blean, near Canterbury, Kent, just so she could touch the keys on their piano in the front room. She was seven, and until she heard someone playing boogie-woogie on it, had no idea what a piano sounded like. "And then I was rumbled. Her mum told mine that I wasn't playing with Pamela at all, but playing the piano instead. A bit later, Pamela's mother wheeled the piano up the road to our house, saying that I clearly liked it more than her children.

"In 2001, when I got my MBE, that wonderful lady came to the party and I pinned the medal on her chest."

The youngest of five siblings, Chi-chi was captivated by music, but her parents could barely afford the three shillings and sixpence it cost per lesson. At the age of nine, she got a job as a church organist, playing at Sunday School, to pay for her exams. She was 18 when she took up the double bass – and

today, a founder member of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, a fellow of the Royal Academy of Music and a musician of international renown, she plays a double bass dating from 1631 worth "the price of a small mortgage". "Playing music is as fundamental to children's wellbeing as brushing their teeth," she says. "It's that important."

Tahmidur Rahman is also one of five siblings, all sisters. A pop and jazz fan, he lives on Brick Lane, and fell in love with the double bass when he realised how versatile an instrument it is. He plays it at Swanlea School in Whitechapel (he can't take it home; and anyway, with all those girls, there's no room to practise) but he's showing promise, he loves the social aspect of playing, and he'd love to take his passion further. Tahmidur is just the kind of child for whom Boris Johnson's scheme is designed. Perhaps one day he too will grace one of London's world-famous halls – or maybe play the O2 in an R&B band.

Aces of bass: Chi-chi Nwanoku and Tahmidur Rahman



Macaroon mania

Why Covent Garden can't get enough of these sweet treats

Page 36



Lon

CELIA WALDEN ON BABYSITTING GEORGE BEST, MARCUS WAREING AT ST PANCRAS AND TEACHING



MUSICAL YOU

Many of the capital's young musical talents fail to reach their potential in the state school system. Now, as **Alison Roberts** reports, the Mayor is launching a scheme aimed at raising £2million towards teaching the stars of tomorrow.

Leader of the band: Boris Johnson at City Hall yesterday with Tara Jones, Tahmidur Rahman, Amy Portchmouth and Jean-Michael Javier as he launches the Mayor's Music Plan.

GRAHAM JEPSON

DORIS Johnson says he plays the piano, but badly: "It's too

helplessly. Good job he's surrounded by three primary school children and

the fees to take their natural ability beyond the state school classroom.

and perform in public. A further 10,000 kids up to the age of 18 will